

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article9088>



Latvia

Let Vlad stay

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP606 - July 2025 -

Publication date: Friday 18 July 2025

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A Riga-based social-centre project called [Maiznica](#) is facing repression from state security services and the expulsion of one of their members from the country. In this press release from the Collective they aim to spread the news to a wider audience, to denounce the actions of the Latvian state, and to support the demand of for Vladislav Romanenko to be able to return to the country. They want to expose to the world how Latvia, an EU country and a supposedly “democratic” state, is taking notes from the Russian playbook and using spies against social movements and activists, and they want to bring international pressure on the government to reverse the deportation.

Left wing activist to be deported from Latvia

On Tuesday 20 May a left wing activist and a member of a social centre and movement Maiznica, Vladislav Romanenko (Vlad) received a letter from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Latvia with a decision to blacklist and deport them from Latvia.

The reasons for such a decision is based on a secret report by the State Security Service of Latvia. No laws were referred to, the only thing mentioned in the letter is that Vlad holds extreme left wing views. Vlad, originally a Russian citizen, has lived in Latvia for 8 years, is doing a master's degree in Digital Humanities, and owns a flat with his Latvian fiancée. Despite this, the Latvian State Security Service deemed it necessary to deport him, with just a week's warning, and with no charges mentioned.

Despite being a member of the EU and positioning itself as a democratic free state (as opposed to Russia, Belarus and Hungary), Latvia lacks tolerance for left wing discourse, equating any public talk where Marx or socialism are mentioned as anti-government activity, Kremlin sponsored rhetoric or even terrorism. Even though formally a Socialist Party exists, and some progressive elements took their step to the parliament, there is still a lot of pressure both from the security services, police and public opinion, which equates anything left wing to the Soviet Union and from there to Russia and Putinism.

As a result, there are currently no left wing communities, organisations or spaces. Maiznica collective aims at changing this and de-marginalizing critical, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, non-commercial, autonomous and systematic discourses and approaches. The collective also participates in [Riga Anarchist Bookfair](#) and [For Free Palestine](#) movement. It also aims at building a third non-commercial space where people can watch films, cook, socialize or make events for free, with typical events being board games evenings, screenprinting workshops, films nights, and other non-political events.

While we can only speculate on specific reasons for deportations, Vlad has been an active member of Maiznica, which is likely to be the primary reason for such decision, along with him holding Russian citizenship.

Maiznica has also been under surveillance from the Security Service for the last couple of months. After feeling conflicted and confused on why the state ordered him to spy on harmless communities, Kaspars Rozitis [confessed on Facebook](#) to have spied on all Maiznica events since April 25, while also revealing some details of cooperation with Security Services and facts of manipulation by them.

Maiznica has never supported or done anything violent and were acting within the laws of Latvia and keeping

discussions within the “limits” allowed by the “academic topics”. Though the events were deliberately covering non-mainstream topics, Maiznica stands firmly against hatred, violence and is actively building a safe space where anyone who comes without hatred could be heard and respected.

Vlad has been an active member of Latvian society, falling in love with the city of Riga, learning Latvian, organising book and film clubs, volunteering and supporting Ukraine, planning to get a Latvian citizenship and already successfully having applied for cancellation of his Russian citizenship. On 20 May Vlad had to leave his home and become unemployed overnight, also leaving behind his fiancée who had back surgery on the same day.

In any democratic and free country, every person has the right for the freedom of self-expression, thought and assembly. The appeal against Vlad’s deportation will announce a result on 18 July.

We want to spread this story to demonstrate the deeply worrying state of affairs in Latvia and how different the political climate can be within the EU, and how many obstacles there can be for even basic common sense organising in what seems like a free and democratic small country.

We call for international solidarity with the cause and ask to spread the awareness around, as international outreach and opinion still have some substantial weight in Latvia. Activists, workers and all those who do not wish to sit back and just look at the attack on the hard earned civil rights, liberties and democratic principles, can’t win without the network and international support.

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